

PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS INTO EXTENDED FAMILY FOLDS

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

Foster (2004:2) emphasises that even with the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the “extended family safety net is still by far the most effective response to economic and social crises throughout sub-Saharan Africa.” Webb (in Foster, Levine & Williamson, 2005:241) agrees that the extended family system, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, generally serves as an alternative arrangement to provide care to orphaned children. However, Foster (2004:2-3) states that this system is becoming stressed and its capacity to care for orphans may be weakening as some of the orphaned children do slip from this traditional method of orphan care and end up living by themselves in child-headed households (CHH). Phiri and Tolfree (in Foster *et al.*, 2005:16-17) assert that these families need support to enable them to cope with the strain of shouldering the burden of taking in orphaned children. It is in light of this that the researchers were motivated to conduct the study to explore the suggestions on how barriers that hinder effective integration of these children into extended family folds can be overcome with a view to formulating practice guidelines to support this traditional method of orphan care.

A previous article presented the barriers that participants perceived as hindrances to the effective integration of CHH into extended family folds. Table 1 below will present a summary and an overview of these barriers as articulated by participants from all the interest groups interviewed. The researchers have categorised and clustered these barriers according to the circumstances that are related to each of the three interest groups of participants. It is worth mentioning that the barriers presented in each of the columns represent the perspectives of all three of the participant groups and not only the perspectives of the participant grouping in the heading for each column.

TABLE 1
BARRIERS HINDERING EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF CHH INTO EXTENDED FAMILIES

Barriers that hinder effective integration of CHH into extended family folds which are related to circumstances of the children heading CHH	Barriers that hinder effective integration of CHH into extended family folds which are related to the extended family members' circumstances	Barriers that hinder effective integration of CHH into extended family folds which are related to service delivery by social workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children coming from homes with rules different from those of the extended family members. Children having a place to stay on their own. 	Poverty-related challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended family members were unable to take in orphaned children as they were unable to meet the orphaned children's fundamental needs. Extended family members who were unemployed were unable to take in orphaned children. Extended family members with inadequate 	Limitations in service delivery regarding integration of CHH into extended families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social workers' high caseloads led to poor assessment (by social workers) of relatives to integrate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children having support in staying on their own. • Children wanting to keep and care for parents' property. • Children preferring independent lifestyle. • Children's previous negative relationships and experiences with the extended families. • Children's fear and experience of unfair treatment. • Children's unwillingness to relocate. • Children's unwillingness to be dispersed among the extended family members. • Children's behavioural problems being unacceptable to the extended family members. • Children's age (i.e. difficulty in integrating older children). • Stigmatising children whose parents died of HIV/AIDS. 	<p>accommodation were unable to live with orphaned children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse of orphaned children's social grants by the extended family members deterred orphaned children from being integrated with their relatives. • Extended family members were unable to take in more orphaned children as they were already living with other orphaned children. <p>Relational and family challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unresolved conflicts between maternal and paternal families led to the existence of CHH. • Unresolved past relational feuds between the orphaned children's deceased parents and relatives deterred the integration of orphaned children into extended families. • Interference by and criticism from relatives regarding relatives who are willing to take in orphaned children discouraged the willing relatives from taking in the children. • Abuse of orphaned children by extended family members led to the existence of the CHH. • Lack of suitable extended family members to take in orphaned children led to the existence of the CHH. • Lack of contact between orphaned children and the extended families perpetuated the distance between orphaned children and their relatives. • Negative attitudes of children of the extended family members towards the orphaned children. <p>Cultural beliefs and practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchal social organisation inhibits extended family members from taking in orphaned children outside their patrilineage. • Paternal families' unwillingness to take in orphaned children born out of traditional marriages. • Cultural beliefs – respecting deceased parents' wishes for non-integration of the children. 	<p>orphaned children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure from social work managers to place orphaned children into foster care. • Lack of adequate resources, such as vehicles to conduct home visits to do assessment of relatives for integration purposes, and computers to type assessment reports. • Social workers' inability to monitor and support extended families that have integrated orphaned children. • High turnover of social workers led to unsuccessful handover of cases for follow up.
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In this article the researchers present the participants' suggestions on how these hindrances could be overcome to improve the efficacy of the integration process. These suggestions are regarded as "expert advice" as they were provided by the participants on what they perceived could help them to make the integration process of children from CHH into the extended family

more effective (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004:356). The suggestions were considered by the researchers to formulate the practice guidelines to inform the integration of CHH into extended family folds.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND GOAL

Badenhorst (2007:25) explains that research questions are broader questions that unpack the purpose statement (goal) of a research project in an order that allows researchers to build up knowledge in a systematic way, because they are interrelated as one question leads to another, with a final question pulling it all together. The questions guide the research process as they suggest the scope of the project and determine the type of data that should be collected. The research questions posed to focus the study were:

- What are the suggestions to overcome the barriers against integrating children from CHH into the extended families from the perspectives of the extended family, children heading CHH and social workers rendering services to these client systems?
- What are the practice guidelines that can assist social workers in integrating CHH into extended families?

The goal for the study was accordingly set as follows: To explore the suggestions on how to overcome barriers that hinder effective integration of CHH into extended families and to formulate practice guidelines to inform the integration process of the orphaned children into extended families from the perspective of the extended families, children heading the CHH and social workers.

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was followed to realise the goal of the study. The motivation for employing this approach was informed by the work of Donalek and Soldwisch (2004:356) in that the qualitative researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under study from the participants' point of view. This is because the participants are experts in their experiential worlds and are able to articulate and describe their experiences and feelings until the researcher has attained a full understanding of the phenomenon or part of the phenomenon.

Within the qualitative approach an explorative, descriptive and contextual research design was followed. The researchers employed purposive sampling for this study to select participants who had first-hand knowledge about and who were being directly affected by the phenomenon investigated and who were "information rich" so that they could best inform the study by comprehensively answering the research questions posed at the outset of the study (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004:356). The sample was comprised of ten orphaned children heading CHH, eight extended family members related to the children participated in the study, and seven social workers who were rendering social work services to these client systems.

The researcher responsible for the fieldwork used semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to collect the data from the participants. To focus the discussion the following questions were posed to participants from each interest group:

Questions to extended family members:

- What do you think can be done to overcome these obstacles? Any suggestions?
- How would you like the social worker to assist you with the integration of these orphaned children into your home?

Questions to children heading households:

- What do you think would help you to make it easier to go and stay with your relatives?
- How would you like the social worker to help you so that you can go and stay with your relatives?

Questions to social workers rendering services to CHH:

- From your point of view, what can be done to overcome these obstacles [that hinder effective integration of CHH into extended family folds]? Any suggestions?
- What do you think is your role as a social worker in this process of integrating the CHH into the extended family?

The descriptive analysis technique of Tesch's eight steps as cited in Creswell (2003:192-193) was employed to analyse the data to reduce the voluminous information that was gathered into themes, sub-themes and categories, as well as generating patterns and relationships among the data in a coherent and systematic manner. Guba's model for the trustworthiness of qualitative data as outlined by Krefting (1991:215-222) was applied to verify the data.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion on the research findings will be presented in three sections as follows:

- The geographical area where the study was conducted;
- The demographic data of the participants who partook in this study;
- A thematic discussion on the theme, sub-themes and categories which emerged from the processes of data analysis and the consequent consensus discussion facilitated by the researcher not engaged in the fieldwork.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

The site chosen for the research to be conducted in was Bushbuckridge Local Municipality in the north-eastern part of Mpumalanga province. Mpumalanga is divided into three municipal districts, namely Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande and Nkangala. Bushbuckridge is one of the five sub-districts or local municipalities of Ehlanzeni District Municipality. According to Lisa (2008), Bushbuckridge is the largest local municipality in the Ehlanzeni District and it covers approximately 25 586.76 hectares.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The demographic data of the participants will be presented according to the following sub-headings:

- The demographic data of the children heading households;
- The demographic data of the extended family members;
- The demographic data of the social workers.

Demographic data of the children heading households

The ages of the children participants ranged from 16 to 17. There were six children who were 16 years old and four children who were 17 years old. The Children's Amendment Act (Act No. 41 of 2007: Sec 137(1)(c)) stipulates that a child who is 16 years old may be considered as head of a household and bear rights and responsibilities as a caregiver. It is evident from the

ages of the children that they were within the age limit for being heads of these households, according to this Act. Five of the children were male and five were female. Nine out of the ten children were attending school. One of the children was doing Grade 11, five were doing Grade 10, while the remaining three were doing Grade 9. One of the ten children had dropped out of school when she was 14 years old; school attendance is compulsory up to that age, according to the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996: Sec 3(1)(6)).

Demographic data of the extended family members

The ages of the extended family members ranged from 29 to 67. Using Craig and Baucum's (2002:5) human life span, the majority of the CHH participants in the study had relatives who were in the stage of middle adulthood (i.e. between 40 years to 60 years of age, represented by four extended family members) and older adulthood (between ages from 60-65 years, represented by three extended family members) as compared with the young adulthood stage (18-21 years to 40 years of age, represented by only one relative). Four of the extended family members were unemployed and were depending on their husbands, who were earning an income. One extended family member was formally employed as an administrator, while the remaining three extended family members were receiving government social grants. Nine of the extended family members were females and one was male.

Demographic data of the social workers

The ages of the social workers ranged from 24 to 36. Six of the social workers were females and one was male. All social workers had three years and more experience in social work practice. In this regard their broader knowledge and experience of rendering generic social work services added to the credibility of the findings of this study.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION: SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME HINDRANCES TO INTEGRATING ORPHANED CHILDREN INTO EXTENDED FAMILY FOLDS

The findings will be presented according to the major theme (i.e. suggestions to overcome hindrances to integrating orphaned children into extended family folds) with its accompanying sub-themes and categories, which emerged from the processes of data analysis undertaken on the transcribed interviews. Complementing storylines from the transcripts will also be presented, compared and contrasted with existing theories and the literature (Creswell, 2003:196).

The suggestions to overcome hindrances to integrating orphaned children into extended family folds will be presented according to the following sub-themes:

- Poverty relief (subsistence support);
- Advocacy by social workers on behalf of orphaned children;
- Discipline, reprimand and direct orphaned children living with extended families;
- Suggestions on how to deal with specific challenges hindering the integration of the CHH into the extended family;
- Alternatives to family integration;
- Practice guidelines on integrating CHH into extended family folds.

Each of the above sub-themes will now be presented and compared with the existing theories and the literature.

Sub-theme 1: Poverty relief (subsistence support)

In their study on making a difference for children affected by AIDS in Uganda, Gilborn, Nyonyintono, Kabumbuli and Jagwe-Wanda (2001:17) asked guardians who participated in the study to identify services that would help them to better provide for the orphaned children who were in their care. The guardians (participants) identified and prioritised material assistance as the main service that would enable them to take in orphaned children.

The participants in this study confirmed the findings by Gilborn *et al.* (2001:17) as noted above. The need for poverty relief as a suggestion to improve the efficacy of the integration process was strongest among the children participants, followed by the extended family members. Poverty relief which the participants identified included assistance with food and food parcels, social grants, clothes and housing, as demonstrated by the following statements from some of the children:

I think that when we stay with our relatives, social workers should give us food so that we can take it to our relatives. This is what can help us because our relatives would want us to help them with food and this will make them accept us and be happy to stay with us, because they won't be able to buy us food because we will be many.

Social workers should help us with food or grant so that it can help our relatives to take care of us.

Most of the extended family members affirmed that subsistence support would enable them to integrate orphaned children into their homes as articulated in the following statement:

I think it can help if social workers can give them a grant, and social workers must not stop to give them food parcels and say that "because they live with their aunt, their aunt must try and make sure that they eat", because there is nothing I can try to feed them. If they stop to give them food they will create a burden for us as the children's relatives. Even if the relative is someone who is working and is able to buy food, social workers mustn't stop to give them food parcels because if the food gets finished, it becomes a problem.

Assisting the children and their extended family members with adequate accommodation could improve the efficacy of the integration process. The following statements from two of the children who participated in the study refer to this:

They should also help us by building us an RDP house at our relatives because at my grandmother, her house is small and it won't be able to accommodate us all.

My other brother wants to take us as well, it is just that his house is small, maybe if he can be helped with money to build a bigger house that can help, because we are four and we won't fit in his house.

Sub-theme 2: Advocacy by social workers on behalf of orphaned children

Mkhize (2006:231) states that social workers should play an advocacy role as this will ensure that children's rights are not violated and the children's needs are met. She further states that, as advocates, social workers should act as intermediaries between children and other social systems with a view to protecting the rights of the children. The need for social workers to advocate on behalf of orphaned children could enhance effective integration of CHH into extended family folds. The following statements from some of the children participants

emphasised that social workers should talk to extended family members to create an understanding of the importance of family integration:

Social workers can talk to them so that they can take us, because they are aware that we are suffering and we are not safe; sometimes there is no food at home.

Social workers should talk to them, especially to talk to my sister-in-law because she is the one who has a problem, my brother doesn't have a problem. Social workers must find out from them why they don't want to take us.

Most of the extended family members also expressed the need for social workers to talk to relatives who are reluctant to absorb children as demonstrated by the following statements:

I think it will be good that social workers should bring members of the family together and tell them that "here are the children, they don't have parents, so as relatives we would want you to take these children and care for them because you are their relatives".

Maybe social workers can talk to them, it can help these children. It's just that we [referring to the maternal relatives] didn't think of reporting to the social worker that they don't want to be involved in the lives of these children, because I think this could have helped.

Sub-theme 3: Discipline, reprimand and direct orphaned children living with extended families

Some of the extended family members and some social workers participants mentioned that raising orphaned children was very difficult and challenging for the extended families. Some of the extended family members expressed the need for support from social workers to discipline, reprimand and direct orphaned children, so that they can be able to live with these orphaned children, as illustrated by the following comments:

I cannot say that I can be able to discipline them on my own. I won't be able to discipline them. It is important that social workers should help me.

[addressing the social workers]... Don't be afraid to tell them that they should respect people who are older than them and also respect each other. Don't be afraid to show them where they are doing right things as well as where they are doing wrong things... they are still at school, so tell them that they should do what is right... You must talk to them and discipline them so that they can walk on the right way, because they don't have parents.

Sub-theme 4: Suggestions on how to deal with specific challenges hindering the integration of the CHH into the extended family

Table 2 below presents suggestions which were made by the participants to address specific challenges which they identified as hindrances to the integration of orphaned children into the extended family.

TABLE 2
SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC CHALLENGES HINDERING THE INTEGRATION OF ORPHANED CHILDREN INTO EXTENDED FAMILIES

Specific challenges	Suggestions
Dealing with conflict between paternal and maternal families.	Social workers should intervene through counselling to help resolve the conflicts. Family advocates should be utilised to make a determination regarding the custody of the orphaned children.
Dealing with cultural beliefs hampering the integration of CHH into extended families.	The cultural beliefs of the orphaned children should be acknowledged and respected.
Dealing with older children who do not want to relinquish their freedom and independent lifestyle.	To remove younger siblings and integrate them with the extended families. Social workers should provide constant monitoring of older children who choose to remain in their parents' houses.
Dealing with orphaned children who already have adequate housing.	To place a relative in the orphaned children's home. To identify a relative who will monitor the orphaned children on a day-to-day basis while these children remain in the CHH.
Dealing with orphaned children who want to safeguard their parents' house.	To identify a relative who will be lawfully contracted to safeguard the orphaned children's property until the children are old enough to live on their own.
Dealing with lack of suitable or willing relatives to integrate the CHH.	To utilise community-based care organisations to provide care and support to the orphaned children. These organisations should be utilised to receive and manage the orphaned children's social grants. Social workers should monitor compliance with these organisations.

Sub-theme 5: Suggestions on alternative placement options for orphaned children who could not remain/be integrated into the care of their extended families

This sub-theme was divided into three categories which will be presented in this section of this article.

Category: Placement of orphaned children with non-relatives as an alternative placement option

Placement of orphaned children with non-relatives was identified as an alternative care arrangement for children in CHH who cannot be integrated into their extended family, possibly because of the reality of having no relatives. The social workers who created this category also mentioned that this placement option is the best, especially to protect orphaned children from

being exposed to feuds between their paternal and maternal relatives. In confirmation of the aforementioned the following statements may be quoted:

I would prefer that these children should live with people who are not their relatives.

...find a non-relative person to take the child, because there are many non-relative people who want to take the children, we can find that person and place the children and I think it is a good option sometimes.

...when you find a non-related person, I think it is the best because there is no fighting.

One extended family member viewed placement of orphaned children with non-relatives as an option, especially for children who did not have relatives, as demonstrated by the following statement:

I do think of getting a person to live with them even if that person is not our blood relation, because we don't have relatives.

Category: Institutionalisation as an alternative placement option

Some of the social workers indicated that placement of orphaned children in a place of safety resulted in a lack of personal care and affection because of the high number of children in the place of safety. From the accounts of some of the social workers it became clear that orphaned children were placed in places of safety as a last resort, when social workers could not succeed in making suitable alternative care arrangements, and also in emergency cases, where they had to remove the children immediately. The following comments from the social workers underscored this:

We end up not knowing with whom to place the children, but some of the children we removed them and place them at the place of safety.

...at the place of safety the environment is not conducive, because they are too many and they don't get enough attention.

Another problem with our place of safety, it is always full and it gives us problems when we have to remove children immediately.

In view of the high number of orphaned children that need alternative care, one social worker interviewed mentioned the need for more residential care to be built, and stated:

If the government can build many centres for orphaned children where you find that the children do not have relatives because currently our place of safety is full.

Subbarao, Mattimore and Plangemann (2001:28) and Foster (2004:8) are of the view that institutional care should be considered as a short-term alternative only when capable and willing foster families cannot be found. The need for building more institutional care facilities is not supported by Phiri and Tolfree (in Foster *et al.*, 2005:13), who postulate that institutional care facilities have a tendency to act as a magnet to draw orphaned children without potential family caregivers and thus undermine traditional family and community responsibility for orphaned children. Phiri and Tolfree (in Foster *et al.*, 2005:11) suggest that the state and international organisations should mobilise and strengthen families and communities to enable them to take care of their own orphaned children. This view is supported by Foster (2004:8), who confirms that children need affection, attention, security and social connections, which can only be provided by families and communities.

Subbarao *et al.* (2001:29) indicate that one promising option for the existing institutions is to convert them into community-based facilities, such as children's villages, as they have some characteristics of home or family life. The present study also revealed that cluster foster care schemes, which are a form of community-based care, offer a suitable alternative care option for orphaned children who cannot be cared for within their families. This will be discussed below.

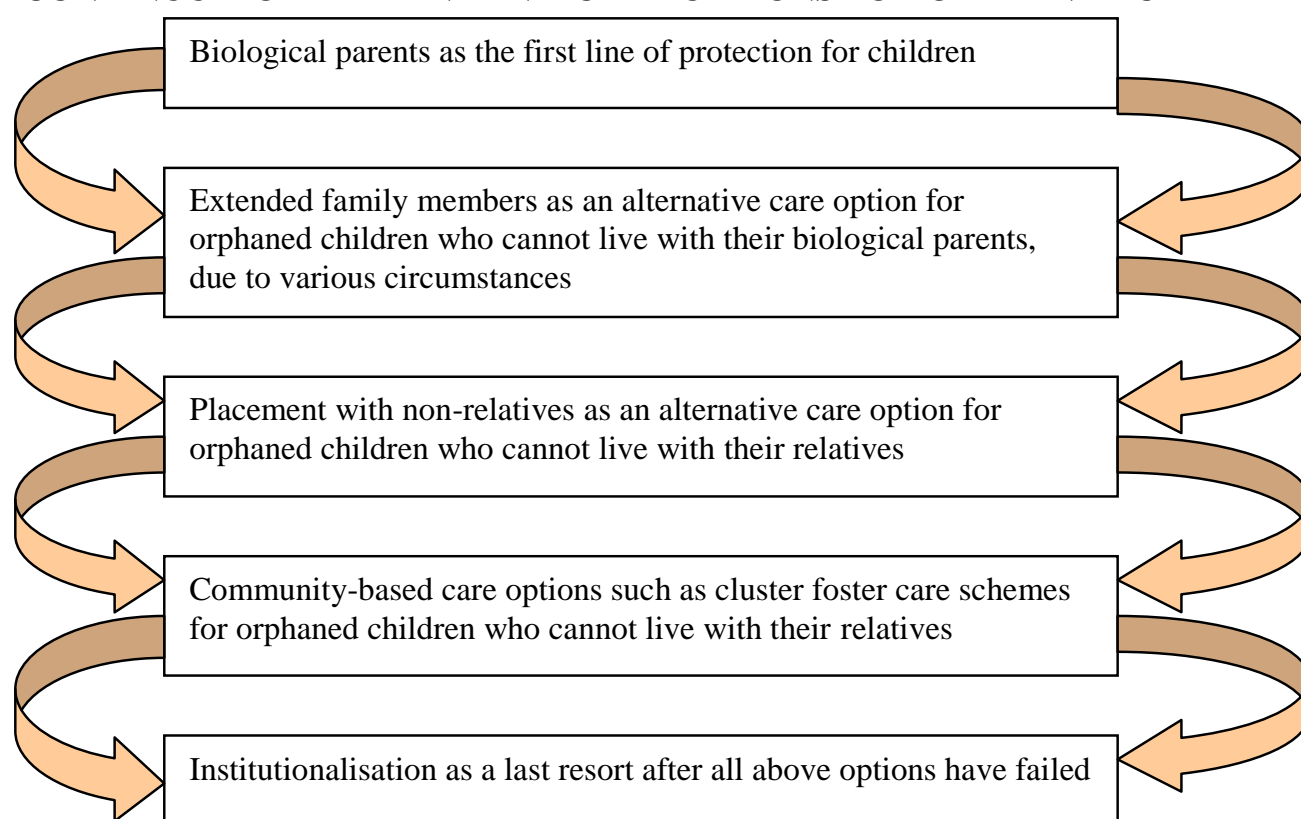
Category: Cluster foster care schemes as an alternative placement option

One of the social workers mentioned that cluster foster care schemes were a better alternative care option for orphaned children who could not be integrated with their extended families than placing them in institutional care, as illustrated in the following statement:

I also think that cluster foster care schemes can also help for orphaned children who don't have relatives to take care of them than putting them in a place of safety because in a place of safety they don't get attention, whereas cluster foster care schemes are houses which are in the same place, and there is a house mother in each house so children will get attention.

Foster (2004:7) states that this model of care provides relatively affordable care as up to six children are cared for within a family either in their communities of origin or a similar social context.

FIGURE 1
CONTINUUM OF ALTERNATIVE CARE OPTIONS FOR ORPHANED CHILDREN



Category: Continuum of alternative care

Figure 1 below depicts the levels of alternative care options according to preferences derived from the suggestions presented in this theme and the literature reviewed for the purpose of providing a literature control (Foster, 2004:3,8; Germann, 2005:385; Phiri & Tolfree in Foster

et al., 2005:11; Subbarao *et al.*, 2001:24-29). It provides a picture of better options for the care and protection of children that social workers should first tap into before proceeding to the next option.

Sub-theme 6: Practice guidelines on the integration of orphaned children in CHH into extended family folds

Besides the suggestions made by the participants on how to address barriers which they perceived as hindrances to the effective integration of orphaned children into extended families (which were presented above), some of the participants from all three cohorts interviewed¹ suggested practices which they felt would enhance the process of integrating orphaned children living in CHH into extended family folds. The researchers have compiled the suggestions, which will be presented logically and chronologically in this section as practice guidelines for dealing with, and enhancing, the integration of CHH into extended family folds. It is worth mentioning that the proposed practical steps are also concurrent with each other.

According to Peters and McKeon (1998:168), practice guidelines are defined in clinical terms by the National Institute of Health as “systematically developed statements to assist practitioner and patient decisions about appropriate health care for specific clinical circumstances”. In the context of this study practice guidelines refer to systematically developed statements of recommended activities to assist social workers and other practitioners working with children living in CHH to integrate orphaned children in CHH into extended family folds.

The proposed practice guidelines emphasise the proactive role which social workers need to play in mobilising communities and families to take care of orphaned children and suggest that the integration of orphaned children with the extended families should begin with community mobilisation. The practice guidelines will be presented in categories and sub-categories below.

Category: Community campaigns with a view to enhancing social work service visibility and the community's responsibility towards orphaned children

Some of the social worker participants suggested that community campaigns should be conducted in order to enhance visibility of social work services, to explain the need for succession planning by the biological parents with a view to care for their children after they have died, to sensitise communities about their social responsibilities towards orphaned children, and to educate communities about basic knowledge on HIV/AIDS. The following statements by the social workers testify to this:

...our office should conduct workshops or campaigns to explain [succession planning by the biological parents with a view to care for their children after they have passed on] to people in communities.

I think community work can also help because we can teach communities the importance of taking care of orphaned children; we can even do it in churches where we can talk to church members about the importance of taking care of orphaned children.

...we need to educate the relatives about the basic knowledge of HIV so that they know the modes of transmission, how HIV can be contracted, because if a person lacks knowledge, of course he/she will be afraid. If he/she has knowledge on how it is transmitted and what precautionary measures to use in dealing with a person who is

¹ Children heading CHH, extended families and social workers.

HIV- positive, it becomes better. Fear is reduced; so we need to educate people about such things.

One of the extended family members concurred that social workers should conduct community campaigns to increase their visibility in communities by stating:

...it is important that social workers should give themselves chance to avail themselves because you find that children don't know where to find them.

Category: Biological parents' succession planning for the children's care after the former have passed on

Bandwidth (2009:1) refers to succession planning as "planning for what will happen to children after their parents have died". Gilborn *et al.* (2001:1) concur that succession planning is an intervention that reaches children before the death of their parents. The intervention includes helping parents to write wills and appoint guardians who will take care of the children after the death of their parents (Gilborn *et al.*, 2001:1).

One of the social workers who participated in this study emphasised that succession planning should be the first step in the integration process to prevent the conflicts and fights which extended family members have over the custody of orphaned children. Biological parents should be encouraged to make a will and nominate a person who will be entrusted with the guardianship of their children when they are deceased, as this will facilitate effectiveness in the family integration process. The following statement from the social worker attests to this:

I think it should begin with succession planning [with parents before death]; planning is about preparing for your life after death... I am talking about something like a will; writing something even through an inDuna (head man) ... and signed maybe before the police officer in a form of an affidavit, which states that the children will live with so-and-so, when the person dies. This will help us as social workers because we won't beat about the bush on who should stay with the children.

This sentiment is supported by the conference report on strengthening coordinated action for orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS, emphasising that parents must prepare their children before the former die, and talk to the children about what will happen to them and make the children aware of their inheritance (Department of Social Development, 2006:14).

Category: Practice guidelines on social work services for the extended families of orphaned children living in CHH

The participants suggested practical steps which social workers should follow in working with the extended families of orphaned children living in CHH with a view to preparing the extended families for integrating orphaned children from CHH. The practical steps will be presented in sub-categories below.

• Sub-category: Identify and locate members of the extended family

Identification and locating of the orphaned children's relatives should be done by social workers, when they become aware that there are children living in CHH without adult care, as illustrated by the following statements from the social workers:

...the first thing when we found that children are staying alone... we should ask the children whether they have relatives. If they have relatives, [we need to find their relatives], distance shouldn't matter to us, whether the relatives are in Pretoria we

should go there or whether they are in Soweto² we should go there and talk to these relatives.

...we should trace the relatives and when we find them we...educate them...help them to understand the importance of family because family is important.

Linking up with this sub-category and with reference to children left orphaned as a result of armed conflict in war-torn countries such as Eritrea, Subbarao *et al.* (2001:27) mention that the tracing of family members may only be the first step in protecting orphans and vulnerable children, provided that relatives are found, that they are willing to take in the children, and that they have the means to absorb the children into their own families. Tracing of relatives should be complemented with other forms of child care such as temporary foster families or institutional care, while the tracing of relatives is still under way (Subbarao *et al.*, 2001:28).

- **Sub-category: Conduct family conference**

Subsequent to the identification and locating of the extended family members, social workers should conduct family conferences involving all members of the extended families (including paternal and maternal families). Some of the social work participants mentioned that family conferences will enhance the implementation of the family integration process as it will give all members of the extended families an opportunity to deal with their differences, sensitise them to the importance of family integration, and afford them an opportunity to decide on and choose a suitable relative for the integration process. The following comments are provided in confirmation of the above:

...we need to bring the maternal family and the paternal family together because sometimes these families fight over the children.

I think we need to bring families together and talk to them about their problems and help them to solve these problems.

We must encourage the families that they must sit together and agree amongst themselves on who should take the children.

Some of the children participants agreed that family conferences are important to enable their extended family members to take decisions together regarding their placement and to sensitise them about their need for family integration, as illustrated in the following comment:

Social workers should bring our relatives together so that they can talk and agree on how to take care of us. Then we can go and stay with them ... they should help each other in taking care of us so that it is not the responsibility of one relative to take care of us.

- **Sub-category: Explain integration and its implications**

Phiri and Tolfree (in Foster *et al.*, 2005:27-28) emphasise that preparing the extended family members for their responsibilities towards the integration of the children from the CHH into their fold will lead to more favourable outcomes, as such preparation will sensitise them to the needs and rights of orphaned children. Such preparation should promote an understanding of the emotional issues faced by orphaned children, who may have witnessed their parents' illness and death, and may need emotional support to grieve and come to terms with their changed situation.

² Real place names changed.

The need for social workers to explain to the extended family members what integration of the children from the CHH into their fold entails and its implications was identified by one of the social work participants as well as some members of the extended families of the orphaned children in the present study. They mentioned that being aware of the implications of integrating orphaned children will assist the extended family members to make informed decisions regarding the placement of orphaned children in their homes, and also help them to be prepared to deal with any possible interference, as illustrated by the following comment from one of the social workers:

...we tell them that the government needs a person who is suitable and explain to them the requirements of a suitable foster parent e.g. a person who knows how to protect the children; how they should take care of these children- ensure that children go to school, they eat, they are safe... the kind of support they can get from the government when they take the children, the consequences of abusing the grant or the children – that the grant can be stopped or the person can be arrested when he/she abuses the children. We explain everything to them so that the person takes this decision knowing all the consequences.

In confirmation of this sub-category, extended family members stated:

...we need to be made aware... about the challenges that we could face when we stay with these children.

It is important that we need to know from the beginning... if we don't know that, when we come across difficult situations it will make us want to quit being involved in the children's lives.

- **Sub-category: Identify and assess or screen potential foster parents**

The importance of the screening of suitable relatives to live with the orphaned children came out very strongly in the statements of some of the social workers and some members of the extended families. Proper screening of potential foster parents was perceived as a method of protecting orphaned children from possible abuse by their relatives, who could just be after their grant. The participants emphasised that proper assessment of potential relatives will ensure that orphaned children are placed with relatives who will be able to love and care for the children. The following comments from the social workers illustrate this sub-category and the above precautions:

Don't just integrate them just because they are their relatives, assuming that they will treat the children well the same way their parents did.

...as social workers our role is to make sure that we conduct proper investigations to check whether the relatives are suitable so that we give the children to the right person; not just to do it as a matter of fact.

Some of the extended family members also agreed that social workers should conduct proper screening of potential foster parents to ensure that children are placed with suitable relatives. The following statements convey their sentiments in this regard:

It is important that social workers should intervene so that the children end up with the right people who don't want to use them for the grant.

...social workers [should] ... come and...check from all the relatives who could be able to give proper care to the children without a motivation of a grant because that's what made us to fight over the children.

Category: Practice guidelines on social work services for orphaned children with a view to family integration

Since orphaned children are at the epicentre of the family integration process, some of the participants from each of the three cohorts interviewed suggested guidelines of practice to be followed when working with the orphaned children to involve them in the family integration process. The proposed practice guidelines on working with the orphaned children will be presented in the sub-categories below.

- **Sub-category: Child participation during the planning phase of integration of orphaned children into extended families**

The need for involving the orphaned children in the planning phase of the family integration process was strongly expressed by some of the children and some members of the extended families who participated in this study. Some of the child participants strongly emphasised that the social workers and the extended family members should listen to their voices before making any decision regarding their placement. The following comments from the children affirm this:

It is important that social workers should first ask us if we want to go and stay with relatives because there are children who don't want to stay with relatives. The social worker should find out from these children why they don't want to stay with their relatives and then try and help them... there are children who want to stay with relatives but you find that relatives don't want to stay with the children. It is important that social workers should talk to the children to see if they want to stay with their relatives. Social workers should talk to us.

Some of the extended family member participants echoed the children's suggestions that children should be given an opportunity to participate in making decisions regarding their integration with the extended family members, as illustrated by the following comments:

...social workers to come and talk to the children.

[Social workers] need to listen to what the children want and allow them to decide whether they want to stay with relatives or not.

[Social workers] need to sit down with these children and talk to them...if they don't want to live with us, it must come from them, even if they want to stay with relatives, it will be coming from them too; because we need to do what these children want.

Preparing the extended family's own biological children for the integration of orphaned children may also enhance the efficacy of the integration process. Some of the extended family members also emphasised the importance of hearing the voices of both the orphaned children as well as their own biological children in the integration process, as illustrated by the following statements:

...social workers [should] ... come and talk to the children and everyone who is closer to the children's lives. Social workers need to also check if my children are ready to live with these children and whether they have love for these children.

We need to give ourselves chance to talk to our children and explain this situation [the envisaged integration].

- **Sub-category: Child participation during the monitoring and support phase of the placement of orphaned children with extended families**

Some participants mentioned that social workers should involve children when they monitor and support the placements. Involvement of the children will assist social workers to identify

and address problems and challenges which may arise during the integration period of the children with their extended family members and which could threaten the placement. The early identification of the problems will also avert potential abuse of the orphaned children and enhance the sustainability of the placements. The following statements from some of the extended family members affirm this sub-category and the above suggestions:

...social workers ... should then talk to these children and get to know what their challenges are when they live with us, because you might find that they have problems in their lives which make it difficult for them to live with us. It is better that when social workers talk to them, they should call them to their offices so that they [the children] can be able to open up with them.

Social workers should also ask the children themselves to find out from them if they are well taken care of; the children will be able to tell if they are being ill-treated.

One of the children echoed that social workers should talk to them and ascertain from their own perspective their views on the placement, as this will enhance family integration. The child articulated this as follows:

The social workers must also find out from us what is bothering us most regarding our relatives and then try and solve the problems for us so that we are able to live in harmony with our relatives.

Sub-category: Bereavement counselling of orphaned children living with extended families

Coping with the death of a loved one can be difficult for adults, who are perceived as strong, and it is even more difficult and confusing for children (Lifewatch, 2007:1). Craig and Baucum (2002:643, 649-650) explain that grief work and bereavement enable individuals to deal with emotional reactions that emanate from the loss of a loved one with the aim of “accepting the reality of the loss and re-channelling the emotional energy previously invested in the deceased”.

Although bereavement counselling is important for orphaned children, the children who participated in the present study did not mention it as a need. However, some of the social workers suggested that it is important that they should conduct counselling for the orphaned children, as illustrated by the following comment:

The role of the social worker that we were supposed to do but we are not able to do because of the backlog is counselling. Obviously when children lose their parents they need counselling.

Category: Social work services aimed at the extended families that have integrated orphaned children

The practice guidelines for working with the extended families that have integrated orphaned children will be presented in the sub-categories below.

- **Sub-category: Counselling for extended families living with orphaned children**

Providing counselling to the extended families living with orphaned children could enhance and sustain family integration. One social worker and one member of the extended family participants mentioned that social workers should conduct family therapy sessions in order to deal with conflicts and problems that could arise when orphaned children live with their extended families. The following comment from the social worker attests to this:

...family therapy sessions are needed where there are family conflicts in order to address these problems.

The need for counselling was supported by one of the extended family members, as illustrated by the following statement from the children's grandmother, who once lived with her orphaned grandchildren:

Social workers should talk to the relatives so that they can air the things that are eating them inside; like now you are here and you helped me to talk about things that are eating me inside, things that are painful to me which were caused by these children.

The need for the provision of counselling to the extended families is supported by Rantla, Siwani and Mokoena (2002:35), who state that a great deal of counselling is essential at this stage, because the integration process is still on the brink of either fruition or total breakdown, as relatives could have doubts regarding the family integration decision they have made.

- **Sub-category: Support on how to raise and discipline orphaned children, and to deal with the associated challenges**

This study revealed that the extended families found it difficult to raise orphaned children. Lack of support from social workers on how to raise the children contributed to the breaking down of some of the placements. Some of the social workers and some of the extended family member participants expressed the need for social workers to assist the extended family members in disciplining the children, as the following statements from some of the extended family members indicate:

I cannot say that I can be able to discipline them on my own; I won't be able to discipline them; it is important that you as social workers should help me.

Social workers must talk to the children and discipline them so that they can walk on the right way.

...there were times when they [the children] start doing things that were unacceptable... my heart became sore to scold them because I didn't know how to scold them because they don't have parents.

Some of the social workers strongly expressed the need for social workers to facilitate support groups and parenting programmes for the extended families to help them deal with children's unacceptable behaviour and to raise the children optimally, as illustrated by the following comments from the social workers:

...we should also organise sessions with the relatives so that we can be able to talk to them, and brief them...time and again...organise support groups of some kind where we can meet the relatives and talk to them, and listen to their problems.

...in these support groups we should also teach them on how to take care of children.

...need to facilitate parenting programmes where we can call these relatives to teach them about parenting.

...and also on how they can deal with the children's uncontrollable behaviour.

- **Sub-category: Give priority to and facilitate grant application and payout**

This study has revealed that some of the extended family members were reluctant to integrate orphaned children, because of their inability to provide financially for the children as a result of

their own economic challenges. Some of the participants expressed the need for social workers to expedite the foster child grant application and payout to relieve the extended families of the financial burden of taking care of the orphaned children, as illustrated in the following comment from one of the social workers:

...to provide support to them and to give them assurance that there is going to be a grant that will help them so that the children do not become a burden to them.

Most extended family members attested to this as follows:

...if social worker can give them [the orphaned children] a grant...on a monthly basis it will be better.

...if social workers can give these children a grant it can help because my husband complains about food; he says that he is not able to buy food for many children.

Social workers should help with...grant so that these children can be able to go school, they can pay school fees and also buy school uniforms because you find that the school principal sometimes chase them from school.

Some of the children echoed the need for social workers to expedite the foster child grant as follows:

Social workers should help us with a grant because my grandmother applied for the grant in 2007 and we haven't received the grant yet.

Social workers should help us with food or grant so that it can help our relatives to take care of us.

...if social workers can help us with the grant...because then they won't have to use their money to help us.

- **Sub-category: Supervise and monitor the placement of children in the extended family folds**

The study revealed that orphaned children living with the extended family members could be exposed to abuse and maltreatment because of a lack of supervision and monitoring of such placements. Some of the extended family members and social worker participants strongly expressed the need for ongoing supervision and monitoring by social workers to support the placement of the children in extended family folds. These participants emphasised that the supervision and monitoring of placements should include assessment of the children's wellbeing and the proper spending of the grant. They mentioned that social workers should also interview neighbours and teachers at the schools where the orphaned children are enrolled to ensure the veracity of the information that they have gathered from the children and their extended families. The following statements from the extended family members confirm this:

After social workers have placed these children with a particular family, it is their duty to regularly go and check on the children to see what is happening with the children they have placed with that family [slowly with an emphasis]; and to check if the grant that they are giving them is used properly. If social workers can do it like that, you will see their work [of integrating the children] will go smoothly.

They [social workers] should make sure that they always visit this family to check if the children are in good care ... When they visit, they must also ask the neighbours because neighbours are able to see if the children are suffering or whether the child still goes to

school or not, and if the child is always dirty, and if the child is not given money to buy food at school or the child is not given a lunch box when he goes to school. So, neighbours are able to see these things and they can report these things.

SCHEMATIC PRESENTATION OF THE PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF CHH INTO EXTENDED FAMILY FOLDS

Sub-theme 6 (presented above) has given a word picture of the practice guidelines for the integration of CHH into extended family folds which were suggested by the participants. Figure 2 below provides a schematic presentation of these practice guidelines.

FIGURE 2
RECOMMENDED PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ORPHANED CHILDREN INTO EXTENDED FAMILIES

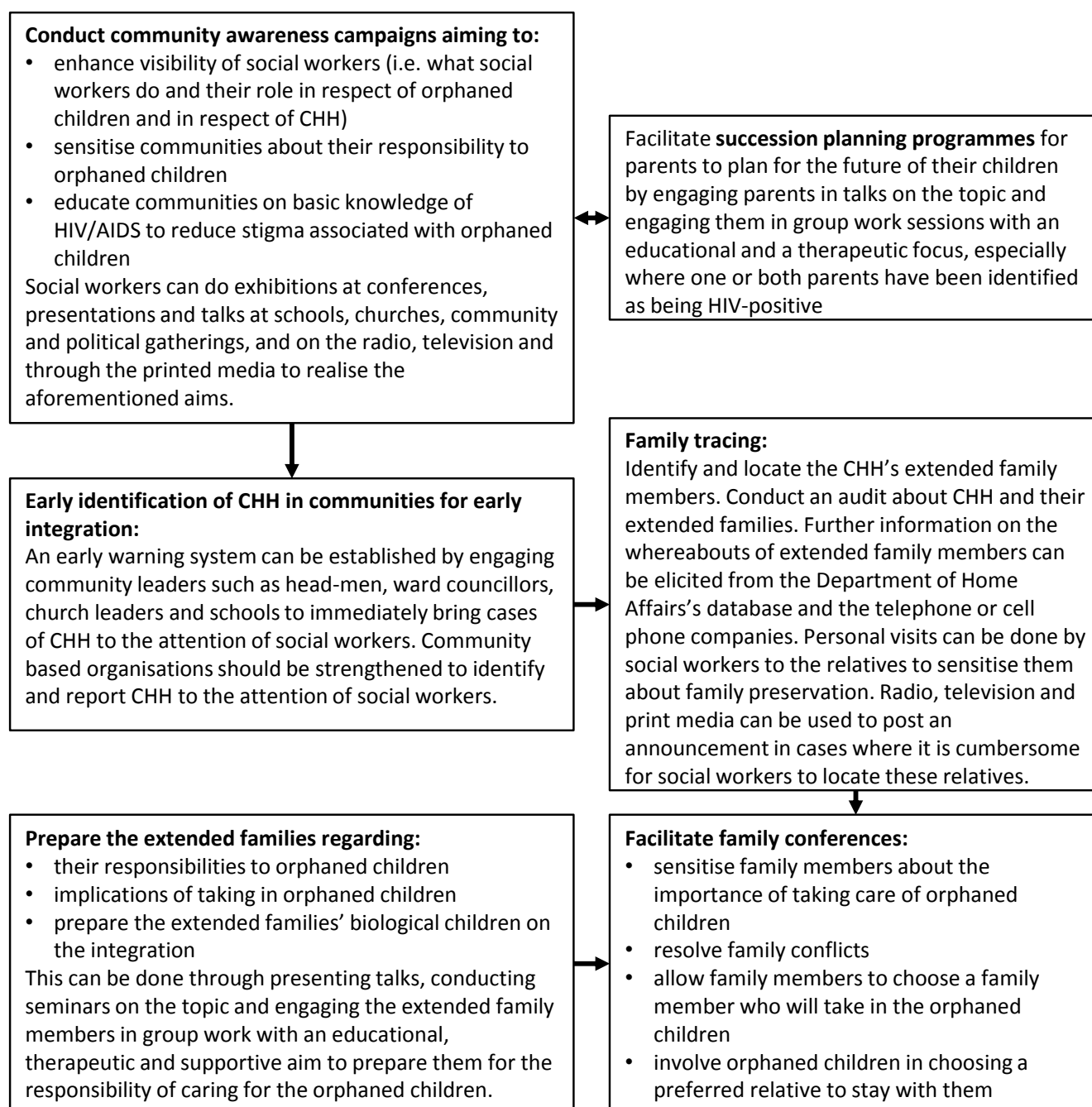
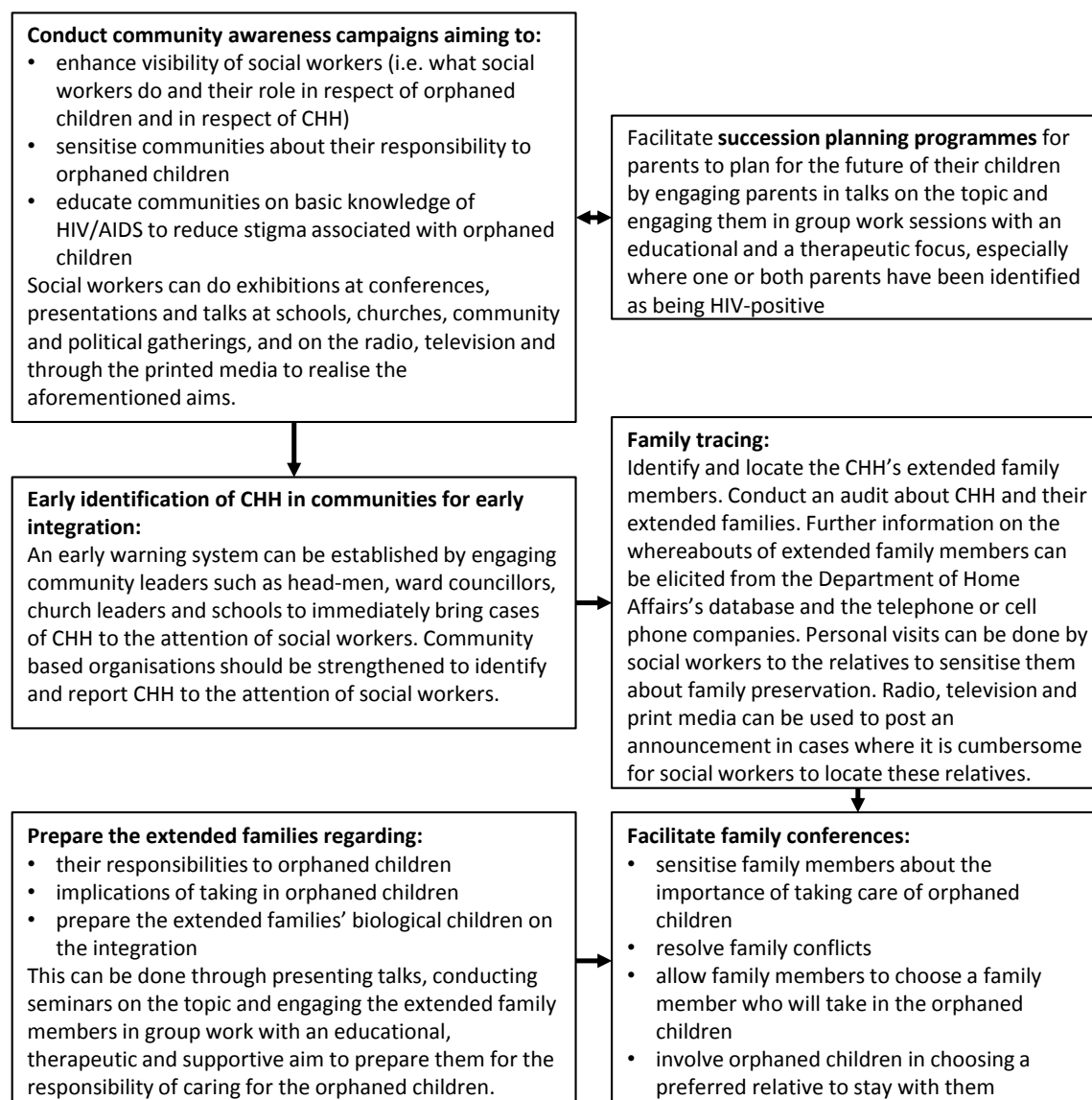


FIGURE 3

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ORPHANED CHILDREN INTO EXTENDED FAMILIES (CONTINUED)



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the research findings pertaining to this theme, the researchers concluded that the suggestions proposed by the participants on how to overcome the barriers that hinder effective integration of orphaned children living in CHH into extended families are indicative of the expertise and capacities which the participants possess in making their own decisions regarding how they want to improve their own lives. From the findings it can be further concluded that most of these suggestions emphasised the role which social workers should play in the integration of orphaned children into extended families. This reflects the expectations which the participants, especially the children heading CHH and the extended families, cherish regarding social workers as key role players in enabling and facilitating interventions which focus on the care and protection of orphaned children and families.

Based on the findings the following strategic interventions are recommended to improve the efficacy of the integration of orphaned children into extended family folds:

- Provide extended families with poverty-relief support;
- Social workers should advocate and mediate on behalf of orphaned children;
- The Social Assistance Act (Act No. 13 of 2004) should be reviewed to introduce a family grant that will cater for the extended families which take in orphaned children;
- The cultural beliefs and practices of orphaned children and the extended families should be acknowledged and respected by social workers with a view to integrating orphaned children into the extended family folds;
- It is critical that social workers should identify orphaned children living in CHH immediately after the death of the last parent to facilitate early integration into extended families;
- Community-based organisations should be encouraged to establish and manage cluster foster care schemes in line with the Children's Amendment Act (Act No. 41 of 2007);
- A further recommendation is for the development and implementation of succession planning programmes by social workers and NGOs to assist biological parents to plan for the future of their children before they pass on;
- The participation of the orphaned children and the extended family's biological children in making decisions which will directly affect their lives should be encouraged.

The following recommendations for further and future research are proffered:

- The study has explored suggestions on how to overcome barriers that hinder the integration of orphaned children into extended families; it was conducted in a rural community of Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga province, South Africa. The results of the study cannot be generalised to other contexts and settings because of its qualitative nature. In view of this, it is recommended that similar qualitative studies should be conducted in other contexts in order to generate broader and more comprehensive perspectives and understanding of the integration of orphaned children into extended families.
- Disintegration of placements of orphaned children with extended families was identified as a detrimental factor in the integration of orphaned children into extended families. Further qualitative studies are needed in order to gain in-depth understanding of the factors that lead to the disintegration of family placements from the perspectives of orphaned children who were previously integrated with their extended families, and of these extended families.

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